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October 16, 2012

Dear Health Care Provider,

We are writing to inform you that since 2006 the Northern New England Poison Center has seen a **three-fold increase in unintentional buprenorphine poisonings among children** under the age of six in Maine (11 in 2006, 38 in 2010, and 30 in 2011.) Most of the children were under the age of three and several experienced life threatening conditions (eg. severe respiratory depression) after ingesting or mouthing a sublingual tablet.

If a child mouths or sucks on a tablet for even a short time, a significant amount of buprenorphine may be absorbed. If the child swallows the tablet, much less is absorbed but concerns still exist. Buprenorphine can cause persistent respiratory depression that may not occur for several hours after ingestion. Close monitoring at a health care facility for up to 24 hours is usually necessary to ensure safety.

We recommend that you educate your patients about this risk. To help we are offering the following resources:

1. Poison center magnet. If a patient suspects a child swallowed or tasted a tablet, they need to call the poison center right away at 1-800-222-1222, even if the child appears fine. All calls are free and confidential. Magnets can be ordered for free from www.nnepc.org using the promo code BUPCARD.
2. Buprenorphine emergency medical information card. This card is designed to 1) remind patients prescribed buprenorphine to store medicine away from children and 2) provide buprenorphine-specific treatment advice to other health care professionals who may see your patient. Cards can be ordered for free from www.nnepc.org using the promo code BUPCARD.
3. Buprenorphine safety agreement. This agreement recommends that this medication be kept out of the reach of children in a locked box at all times. The document can be modified to include your practice's contact information. Additional copies can be downloaded at www.nnepc.org.

Please ask your patient to:

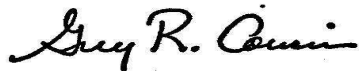
1. Fill out the information card while in your office and store it in their wallet or purse. They should show the card any time they see a doctor and if a child gets any amount of buprenorphine.

2. Sign the safety agreement in your office. Keep a copy in the client chart and give the patient a copy.
3. Post the poison center magnet on their refrigerator and program the number into their cell phone.

If you have any questions about buprenorphine or the potential for delayed and severe respiratory depression in children, please call the Northern New England Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 to speak to a trained health care professional. The toll-free helpline provides free, confidential, expert telephone assistance 24 hours a day.

Thank you for your support in this effort and your continued commitment to delivering high quality care to your patients.

Sincerely,



Guy R. Cousins
Director, Maine Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services



Therese Cahill-Low
Director, Maine Office of Child and Family Services



Dr. Shelia Pinette
Director, Maine Center for Disease Control